

The University of Texas at Austin
Response to House Higher Education Committee
Formal Request for Information
COVID-19 Interim Charge

- 1. Are institutions of higher education ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab setting, dormitories, and dining halls.**

The health of our students, faculty, staff, and visitors remains at the forefront of all planning for the fall semester. In April, UT Austin established six workgroups to provide plans for a phased re-opening of the campus, covering Academics, Health and Wellness, Student Life, Operations, Research, and Athletics. The result of those extensive planning sessions, released in June, is the Protect Texas Together plan. While online learning will be critical to the continuity of education, the on-campus experience plays a central role in the university's mission – even with the restrictions that the pandemic will place on campus life. As such, highlights of the plan include extensive online or hybrid online/in-person class offerings, wearing face coverings when inside buildings (except in a private office or personal dorm room, or while eating), strong hygiene practices, frequent building inspection and cleaning protocols, a request for students to self-quarantine for 14 days prior to arrival, and suggested daily symptom screenings through the Protect Texas Together smartphone app. Approximately 77% of classroom seats will be online this semester, and for those classes or labs with an in-person component, classrooms will be limited to 40% capacity and seating will be spread out according to social distancing guidelines. Additionally, staff members who are able to perform their job duties from home will continue to do so into the fall with approval of their managers, in an effort to further reduce density on campus.

On-campus residence halls are fully operational, and an extended move-in period began on August 20th. The University allowed students to cancel housing contracts with no penalty for COVID-19 related reasons, including taking all-online courses, and this year there are 3,450 students living in the University's 14 on-campus residence halls, which is approximately 50% capacity. Each student living in an on-campus residence hall was asked to sign a "COVID-19 Amendment" to their housing contract outlining health and safety practices and expectations, such as wearing a protective face covering in dorms unless in their own room. High-touch areas like door handles, faucets, elevator buttons, etc. are disinfected 3x daily, common areas also receive daily disinfection cleaning, and plexiglass dividers have been placed between sinks. If a student living on campus tests positive for COVID-19 and does not have another location in which to self-isolate, the University will assist in providing a space and meals.

In campus dining facilities, 6-foot distance markers have been placed to allow for social distancing, sanitizing stations have been set up throughout the serving and seating areas, self-service food has been replaced by to-go containers, and there are touchless dispensers for napkins and condiments. Face coverings will also be required in dining facilities unless the patron is eating, and occupancy-tracking measures with digital displays have been employed to ensure proper social distancing can be practiced.

The University will continually monitor its progress and adjust plans as needed in response to changes in the public health environment. UT Austin’s “Protect Texas Together” fall reopening plan can be found at: <https://protect.utexas.edu>.

2. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do institutions have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

UT Austin has implemented an extensive testing system on campus in anticipation of the fall semester. The University has the capacity to test hundreds of symptomatic students each day using our in-house lab, with results turned around within 24 hours. We have also acquired three rapid testing machines that will allow for 100 tests/day with a 15-minute turnaround time for results. Symptomatic faculty and staff may utilize their own healthcare provider or get COVID-19 testing at UT Health Austin, the clinical arm of Dell Medical School. All symptomatic testing will be billed to an individual’s insurance, and for uninsured students the university will subsidize the cost of the test so there is no out-of-pocket expense. UT Austin will also conduct free proactive community testing for members of the UT community who are asymptomatic in an attempt to help monitor the spread of the infection. The goal is to test approximately 5,000 members of the UT community each week, as well as all students living in campus residence halls within the first couple of weeks of moving in. Importantly, testing (especially for those who are asymptomatic) is voluntary, and is being offered at little-to-no cost to those being tested.

Primarily, UT Austin is using in-house labs to perform symptomatic COVID-19 testing for students, as well as asymptomatic proactive community testing for students, faculty, and staff. Individuals who get tested at UT Health Austin will have their tests processed by a lab external to the university. By conducting the vast majority of our testing in-house, UT Austin has tried to shield itself from potential fluctuations in supply and demand that can impact commercial and other third-party labs. However, to supplement these in-house capabilities, UT Austin is contracting with outside laboratories in case additional or back-up resources become necessary.

3. If applicable, what are plans for collegiate athletics this fall? How will student athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?

Texas Athletics developed extensive [plans](#) in consultation with a broad spectrum of experts to keep student-athletes healthy upon their return to campus. Daily temperature and symptom checks have been implemented, as well as strict hygiene protocols and three-times-a-week COVID-19 testing for student-athletes. In addition, with the potential COVID-19 concerns relating to myocarditis, rigorous heart screening procedures — including an EKG, echocardiogram, and cardiac MRI — are in place for all student-athletes that test positive and must be cleared before returning to activity. As of this writing, stadium capacity for home football games will be restricted to 25%, which translates to roughly 24,000 seats. The full plans for keeping fans safe can be found [here](#). Highlights include mobile ticketing, being required to use the entrance gate specified on your ticket to avoid overcrowding, 6-foot distance markers in lines, required wearing of face coverings, extensive

cleaning of high-touch surfaces, hand sanitizing stations placed throughout the stadium, and contactless transactions for concessions.

4. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like to institutions for this school year?

Enrollment last year was approximately 51,090 and is expected to be close to that level but slightly lower for the Fall 2020 Semester, in keeping with normal year-to-year fluctuations. The University will not have final figures until after the 12th class day, which falls on September 11th, and we can provide further information to the committee once we have that data.

5. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?

Thus far, there has been no significant change in employee retention. Resignations are slightly lower than in past years, and the number of retirements has remained in line with previous years. Our faculty and staff have been very willing partners in revamping the educational environment to keep everyone safe as well as provide a quality learning experience for our students.

6. Health Related Institutions were exempt from the 5% budget cuts earlier this year, due to their important role in resolving the public health crisis. What are some of the programs, research, and responses to the pandemic that our Health Related Institutions have contributed?

Prioritizing collaboration, vetted needs, vulnerable communities, and health equity, Dell Med faculty and staff rapidly responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to put expertise to work on multiple fronts across Austin and Travis County.

Dell Med faculty are part of local, state, and national advisory teams informing clinical, public health, and policy initiatives, including Dean Clay Johnston, M.D., serving as an informal advisor to the mayor and county judge; Amy Young, M.D., leading UT Health Austin clinical care and advising UT Austin officials on testing, contact tracing and campus reopening strategies; Parker Hudson, M.D., serving as a chief medical advisor for Gov. Greg Abbott's Strike Force to Open Texas; Mark McClellan, M.D., also serving as a chief medical advisor on the Strike Force to Open Texas; Jonathan MacClements, M.D., appointed alternate health authority for Austin Public Health; and Jewel Mullen, M.D., serving on the Committee on Equitable Allocation of Vaccine for the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

Early in the pandemic, Dell Med and UT Health Austin teams, in conjunction with Austin Public Health, provided clinical expertise and significant resources to rapidly develop and scale a contact tracing program for patients testing positive at the UT Health Austin drive-thru testing site. In April, this effort expanded to include patients from CommUnityCare, Dell Seton Medical Center, Dell Children's Medical Center and Ascension Seton Medical Center Austin. From April through July, a

team of 200+ volunteers managed approximately 4,000 patient cases, subsequently identifying nearly 8,600 related contacts. As of August, the contact tracing team shifted its focus to support UT Austin faculty, staff, and students returning to campus for fall classes.

The Design Institute for Health put its team of designers to work on multiple fronts amid the pandemic, including an ongoing project for the City of Austin to identify opportunities to protect nursing home residents and reduce risk of COVID-19 spread in a variety of long-term care facilities; collaborating with clinical leaders from CommUnityCare to develop a nationally distributed guide for establishing and scaling efficient drive-thru testing sites; and working with the City of Austin to create FeedATX, a resource for matching emergency food assistance support with organizations serving vulnerable populations in Central Texas.

Research and collaboration between the health-related and general academic sides of the University has been extensive. UT Austin has more than 200 researchers (Principal Investigators and personnel including staff scientists, grad students, and postdocs) who are working on COVID-related projects. Projects are wide-ranging, and include convalescent blood plasma therapy treatment methods, providing epidemiological modeling to local governments, and a unique partnership between Dell Med's Texas Health Catalyst program and engineers from UT Austin's Cockrell School of Engineering to design, build and distribute low-cost bridge ventilator devices to help care for COVID-19 patients. Pending emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), about 50 of the specially designed ventilators, which use inexpensive and widely available mechanical parts, will be distributed to rural hospitals across the state in partnership with the Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals.

Additionally, scientists from UT Austin's Department of Molecular Biosciences created the first 3D atomic-level map of the virus, and then discovered a way to stabilize the spike protein, the otherwise shape-shifting part of the virus that infects cells; this research is currently being used in four leading vaccine candidates undergoing human clinical trials. Building upon their earlier research into coronaviruses, this was the fastest-ever progression from virus genome sequencing to vaccine testing in humans, which took just 66 days.

7. How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets?

UT Austin's finances have been significantly impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the closure of the university in March 2020, approximately \$36 million in housing, dining and parking refunds were issued to students and staff. Study abroad programs were cancelled, forfeiting substantial tuition and fee revenue. Events centers and facilities that serve both the campus and the greater Austin area, including the Texas Performing Arts Center, the Blanton Museum of Art, and the AT&T Executive Education & Conference Center, were also closed during the shutdown.

As of August 2020, UT Austin's revenue losses due to COVID-19 in fiscal year 2020 alone are estimated to be approximately \$82 million. A significant portion of these revenue losses are projected to continue into the 2020-21 academic year, as the campus has reopened in a modified capacity based on the public health environment. In addition, the University's share of the 5% reduction to 2020-21 biennial state funding totals \$28 million.

Adding to this financial impact are the costs of preparing UT Austin for the Fall 2020 semester. The University's Protect Texas Together plan details a framework for providing a hybrid model of both on-campus and online learning, with the primary goal of providing a safe educational environment for our students and faculty. The costs to UT Austin for all aspects of this plan – educational technology necessary for successful online instruction, provision of personal protective equipment and sanitizer, retrofitting campus facilities for safety, testing and monitoring equipment and supplies – is currently estimated to cost in excess of \$29 million, with costs likely increasing throughout the academic year.

These losses have been partially offset by funding UT Austin has received from the federal government under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The institutional portion received for higher education relief was \$15.7 million. An additional \$15.7 million that came to the University under the CARES Act for direct aid to students was distributed to nearly 9,500 UT Austin students for needs such as housing, food, technology, course materials, and healthcare. The University is working to provide additional financial aid to support students this fall.

8. How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges?

N/A.

9. Does your institution have a public, online dashboard for the reporting of positive COVID-19 cases which is updated daily? If so, what is the link to the dashboard?

Yes, UT Austin unveiled a public-facing dashboard in July. The dashboard is the result of collaborative efforts by University Health Services, the Occupational Health Program, UT Health Austin, Dell Medical School, and Austin Public Health: <https://coronavirus.utexas.edu/ut-austin-covid-19-dashboard>.